ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME	DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ERIC NUMBER	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.
ED002015	NA	NA

DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW

4. AUTHOR(S):
Washington, Bennetta B.

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED:
Cultural Enrichment Programs

6. PUBLICATION TITLE:
NA

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YES ☐ NO ☐

TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☐
FINAL ☒
FOLLOW-UP ☐

7. EDITOR(S):
NA

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN
Cardozo High School
ORG.
ST.
CITY, STATE
Washington, D.C.
TELE. EXT.
INST/LOC CODE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE
Cardozo High School
Washington, D.C.

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
NA	NA	Oct/63	12

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR
essay

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

culture	curriculum	integrity		
teacher training	creativity	low income		
cultural enrichment	interaction	culturally different		
	self-knowledge			

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

Methods by which cultural enrichment programs can help to eliminate juvenile delinquency are discussed. It is stressed that culture is a set of values, rather than a series of concepts. If culture is to be transmitted to students, teachers must live its values; attending concerts and plays is not sufficient. Only in the broad setting of a total school program can such values be fortified and developed. Flexibility of teacher-training institutions and certification requirements should be investigated, since the teacher is in the most strategic position to channel cultural conflict into growth. Integrity and knowledge of self are pointed out as the most crucial areas of concern for teachers working with culturally different youth.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
	22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
	23. DURATION OR PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

ERIC Form 1

"CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED"
SCHOOL COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

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ED002015

CULTURAL ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS

Working Paper Prepared by
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Presented to

Educational Conference
School Program for Delinquency Prevention and Control
Department of Health, Education and Welfare
Office of Education

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OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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October 30, 1963

Office of Education-EEOP
Research and Materials Branch

Bennett O. Stalvey

In preparing myself to talk to you on ways in which cultural enrichment programs can deter juvenile delinquency, I found it necessary to overcome some initial hesitancy. First of all, the education and experience of this audience made any review and/or analysis of existing cultural programs an unforgivable redundancy. Secondly, I had to crystalize some of my own thinking on "cultural enrichment." Thirdly, I had to delve into the many and varied meanings and approaches to this aspect of education and emerge with a clear definition of the term. It occurred to me that "culture" is without question one of the most ill-used, misunderstood words in the English language. In the minds of the so-called average citizen (which includes the insurance executive as well as the street-cleaner) the word "culture" evokes vague impressions of stuffy museums, "difficult reading" and music that has no "beat." To the society-conscious matron who must identify herself from the classes beneath her, it may mean supporting a benefit performance of an obscure play by an even more obscure company, or having her portrait painted by a fashionable artist. Even more dissimilar is the way in which the word is understood by well-meaning teachers, educational administrators, and civic groups. They know, of course, that culture is desirable for the youth in their charge, so they glance about the community to find something that smacks of the high-tone, if not the highbrow, gather their students into fairly homogeneous groups and head them off to a local museum, park, library, or theatre, secure in the knowledge that they have "culturally enriched" the lives of these students. Or perhaps they are not so secure. Didn't Johnny look more bewildered than awed; and Tony more bored than impressed? What did the experience <u>mean</u>? What real relationship did it have to their lives? Or was it, as it has often been in the past, a pleasant relief from classroom tedium?

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Last spring at Cardozo High School, here in Washington, D. C., some students from Silliman College, Yale University, presented a complete performance of Oedipus Rex, by Sophocles. For most of these high school youngsters, this was their first chance ever to see a full-length play actually on the stage--and not encased in the television screen. It was produced with costumes, lighting, incense, Greek choral dances and chants. The voices of the actors were youthful and fervent; and the fervor of the production was transmitted to the watching youngsters. When Oedipus gouged out his eyes in his unrelenting search after Truth, there was complete, stunned, horrified silence in the auditorium--and after the play there was vigorous applause. Later, interested students gathered on the stage around the actors and fired away questions about why an actor had said a certain line in a particular way, why certain bits of stage business had been included, and what ideas the actors thought Sophocles was trying to present.

This fall, just two weeks ago, again at Cardozo High School, 10 young Americans, all in their twenties, presented a program in which they described to the high school youngsters certain facets of their experiences abroad when they served as Peace Corps Volunteers. All of these 10 former Peace Corps Volunteers are paid teacher-interns in Cardozo for the year 1963-64 under a grant from the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency. In the assembly program, one of the interns described life in Turkey, another described life in the Philippines, another illustrated a Pakistani game of tag, and four others, dressed in native costumes, did an energetic Philippine dance in which the dancers step in and out of long bamboo poles (at Cardozo, they used long window poles) which are rhythmically clapped against each other and against the floor to keep time and to provide a

moving obstacle for the dancers. At the end of the dance, the students cheered with the kind of applause usually reserved for a winning touchdown.

We would all recognize these two assembly programs as programs in "cultural enrichment." I think it is important to understand what cultural enrichment ought to be before any attempt to discuss its possibilities in curbing juvenile delinquency can be undertaken. In the first place, to talk about the need for cultural enrichment is to imply that we are dealing with a condition of cultural poverty. And as each of us here knows, this assumption is only partly correct. To decide whether youngsters from lower socio-economic groups, many of them Negroes, Mexican-Americans, and Puerto Ricans, are culturally poor, or merely culturally different from the predominant middle class and upper middle class American culture, one must of course be clear about the definition of the word "culture."

If by "culture" we mean the "complex of distinctive attainments, beliefs, and traditions constituting the background of a racial, religious, or social group,"--which is one definition of "culture" in Webster--then clearly our students, in some respects at least, are culturally different, but not culturally deprived.

On the other hand, if by culture we mean "conversance with and taste in fine arts, humanities and broad aspects of science, as distinguished from vocational, technical, or professional skill or knowledge; refinement in manners, taste, and thought; delicacy of taste and nicety of breeding"--which is another definition of "culture" in Webster--then, just as clearly, our students, in most respects, are not just culturally different, but are culturally poor.

Obviously, those of us who know and appreciate the existing culture of our youngsters but who also know and appreciate aspects of another culture which most of our youngsters have so far missed, cannot easily choose one definition to the exclusion of the other. For surely our job is neither to accept the culture of our students as an anthropologist might accept the culture of some South Pacific Island, as the first definition might imply, for change as well as acceptance is needed. Nor is our job to impose upon our students a haphazard familiarity with theatre, opera, modern art, ballet and concerts--as the second definition might imply, for surely these are only the trappings of culture.

The word "culture" is thus highly ambivalent, and tends, I think, to obscure our thinking rather than to clarify it. When we think about the word "culture," we seem to be faced with a complete dichotomy--yet we continue to use the word without resolving the dichotomy and without facing the question of whether a dichotomy really exists. The words "cultural enrichment" and "culturally deprived," are thus easy labels which may give us a comfortable feeling that we are at least coping with the problem--and it is precisely that comfortable feeling which can keep us from realizing that we have not even <u>understood</u> the problem.

Our basic problem is not to choose between these unrealistic alternatives, but rather to do what we can to help build of our youngsters fully integrated personalities for whom the best of Western culture can play a meaningful part. We are seeking to develop integrity--integrity in which a youngster neither placidly accepts all of his present values and commitments, nor ostentatiously assumes the forms and trappings of a culture which he might wear like some fancy new coat. In this sense, our task is

to try to make the two cultures meet and blend--in the person of the individual. Actually, we should take care not to glorify a middle class culture which exists, perhaps, more in our imagination than in reality. I wonder, for instance, how many youngsters in suburban schools are attending concerts or ballet every weekend, or even every month--or even, perhaps, every year. The gap between cultures may not, indeed, be so wide as some would like to believe. Even the word "gap" may be misleading; it may be much more helpful to think of a spectrum of cultural values, with particular individuals and sub-groups differing from, but blending imperceptibly with, other individuals and sub-groups. And if we are dealing with individuals on a spectrum, we must realize that each one of these individuals has his own particular cultural conflicts, and each one of these individuals has the potential to become a fully integrated responsible human being in which his own cultural conflict can be an essential part of growth.

Of course I do not want to go so far as to say that there are no meaningful generalizations which can accurately characterize the lower socio-economic classes as a group, as distinct from observations about individuals in that group. It is fair to say, that there seem to be certain general characteristics of cultural poverty which many of our youngsters possess: a lack of basic knowledge and information; difficulty in communicating verbally; and above all, an ignorance of themselves. It is particularly this last characteristic--a brooding, pervasive and abysmal ignorance about themselves--that is most relevant to our discussion of culture.

For surely one of the most basic assumptions in all of our Western culture is that self-knowledge is a good in and of itself. It was Socrates

who said that the unexamined life is not worth living. This may somewhat overstate the case, but for those of us dealing with youngsters there is another way to state the same essential point: the examined life is far more worth living than the unexamined life. In other words, self-knowledge can be a form of therapy, a force for change, and an inspiration for growth into responsible and creative human beings. An awareness on the part of students that self-knowledge is a good in and of itself can be partly developed by acquainting out students with some of the great introspective works of Western art and literature. The unrelenting search by Oedipus for the truth about himself was not a lost lesson on many Cardozo students--particularly those 10 or 12 English classes that had read and studied the play before the Yale production.

When I speak about a lack of self-knowledge as one of the basic characteristics of cultural deprivation, I mean something much more basic than the lack of self-awareness of various psychological motivations. I really mean that so many of our students have been told for so long by so many voices in our society that they are failures, that they are inferior, that they have no future ahead of them and that they are just one vast group of juvenile delinquents and culturally deprived youths. Many of them have come to believe not only that these things are true about themselves, but also that there is very little to distinguish one "self" from another in this group.

These youngsters do not know who they are, what they can be, or even what they want to be. They are afraid, but they do not know of what. They are angry, but they do not know at whom. They are rejected, and they do not know why. So they make up answers, and out of their abysmal ignorance

of self come strange fancies that they substitute for knowledge. Not knowing who they are, they hide behind an appearance. Not knowing what they want to do, they want and do nothing. They create substitutes to be angry at and to attack violently. And, perhaps worst of all, they accept without question the world's judgment of them as not simply unlovable, uncultured failures but as one such failure lost in a vast sea of failures. In short, not only do many of our so-called deprived youngsters know little about themselves, but many of them also do not even realize that they are different from the person at the next desk, or the next streetcorner.

We in the schools should be frank to admit that we have played our part in creating and maintaining this feeling of failure and this pathetic concept of self. The schools should be devoted to developing agile minds and strong spirits and unique human beings each of whom appreciates his own uniqueness. Yet too often we have rewarded the rigid mind and the docile spirit, and too often we have looked upon our youngsters as simply an undistinguishable mass of the culturally-deprived. The sharp, intelligent question has been rejected, and the easy answer too often accepted. In the face of this treatment, many of the strong and agile have left our ordered classrooms for the more challenging and seemingly less defeating atmosphere of the streets--where individuality, some of them hope, can be discovered and maintained.

This is an unforgiveable failure on the part of the schools, because I submit that the schools are the last and main hope for developing agile, strong, and independent spirits in our youngsters. How can we in the schools meet this challenge?

We can do so partly by a questioning and experimental attitude toward our curriculum. We should face the fact that the traditional curriculum has failed to reach most of our youngsters, and that new kinds of work-study programs, emphasizing individual creativity both on the job and in the classroom, are required. Actually, of course, I suspect that a basic admiration for an agile mind and a strong, creative spirit is why some people think that it is good for our students to hear Mozart played by the National Symphony, or to see Oedipus performed by the Yale players: we have the hope that by appreciating Mozart and Sophocles, our students can themselves realize the potentialities of the creative spirit. But how many other ways there are of conveying the same values: the school orchestra; the school drama group; the school football team; the history class debating slavery as a cause of the Civil War; the English class discussing the agility of mind and strength of spirit of both Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan in Miracle Worker; the secretarial class developing a new system for filing to meet a particular office problem;--all these, and many others, are ways in which agile minds and strong spirits and vigorous creativity can be nurtured in our schools. And in so doing we are enriching the cultures of our students in the most fundamental and most important way possible: we are helping to teach clear thinking, frankness, creativity, and a questioning, probing attitude toward self, life and society.

But even more important than such an experimental attitude toward curriculum in helping our youngsters develop a positive image of themselves is the relationship that must develop between the teacher (and by teacher I mean anyone whose job it is to guide and instruct) and the student. I am personally convinced that an important part of the student's concept

of himself can come from his interaction with teachers. A teacher, by encouraging individuality, can help to create that very uniqueness that seems, at first glance, to be so lacking among the so-called "culturally deprived." If we expect our students to question and to reach, we must have teachers who themselves are able and willing to question and to reach. Agile minds in students are not going to be developed by rigid minds in teachers, and strength of spirit is not going to be developed either by weakness or domination on the part of teachers. Indeed, as Rousseau said, how do we expect our children to be well-educated unless they are taught by people who themselves are well-educated?

And so, it seems to me, the real place to focus our attention--if we wish to develop meaningful, long-range programs of cultural enrichment--is upon the problem of training teachers. Teachers must be trained not only in their particular subject fields, but also in the psychology and sociology of the culturally-deprived. We must have a constant desire to succeed in the face of tremendous difficulties. We must come to know that nothing is more quickly transmitted to our students than the atmosphere of defeat, and that nothing is more infectious than success, earnestness and enthusiasm. We must possess a sophisticated sense of dedication and idealism by believing in the importance of the job we are doing. We can show the students the importance of the students themselves in the most dramatic concrete way possible. In other words it is the teachers who are primarily responsible for transmitting culture in the schools. If we are going to transmit cultural values to our students, then we must live these values. We cannot talk about America's respect for the individual while behaving disrepectfully toward individuals. We cannot talk to our students about idealism and the satisfaction of

a job well done if with every gesture we tell of our own dissatisfaction. No one sees through deception more quickly than adolescents, and perhaps some of our culturally-deprived adolescents see more clearly than most the gap between our actions and our words.

Thus when some of our Peace Corps interns get up and perform a Philippine dance, I am less interested in the little piece of Philippine culture which they are demonstrating than I am about the values of naturalness and strength and agility and commitment which they are demonstrating in a much more profound manner just by their presence on the stage clanking window poles together. Now of course there are many kinds of strengths and agilities and commitments--agility in a Philippine dance does not happen to be a quality that many of us have. In fact, I shudder to think of trying it myself. But each of us in the schools has some unique way of showing our students our basic respect for the student as a person, and our dedication to the training of agile minds and strong spirits. The point is, however, that we in the schools need just the kind of injection of idealism and enthusiasm which America's young people have proven they possess by serving in the Peace Corps. Just returned from two years' teaching in the Peace Corps abroad, this large group of concerned young people can perhaps supply some of that commitment to cultural values which I have been discussing here. The challenge is to introduce enough flexibility into our teacher-training institutions and into our certification requirements to make teaching in this country not a threat to idealism and imagination but an outlet for idealism and imagination.

Culture, in this deep sense that I have been discussing, is a set of values--not a series of concerts. Concerts--by Ella Fitzgerald and

Louis Armstrong and Peter, Paul, and Mary, as well as by Leonard Bernstein and Andre Watts--may help to convey the values, but it is only in the broad setting of a total school program that the values can be fortified and developed. And the most important way to build this set of values into the curriculum in a way which the students can absorb is to have teachers who themselves are agile in mind and strong in spirit. The challenge of cultural enrichment is thus really a challenge of teacher enrichment, for it is the teacher who is in the most strategic position to help channel cultural conflict into real growth.